



Amnesty International Reading Group NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2012

PROTECT THE HUMAN

We are ordinary people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights. Our purpose is to protect individuals wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- **AI:UK's Director Kate Allen comes to Reading for the International Festival , 8pm Thursday 18th October** – Friends Meeting House, 2 Church Street, Reading RG1 2SB. Come and hear Kate talk about the Middle East and North Africa. This is a free event – donations on the night to AI:UK.
- **Protest for our Prisoner of Conscience, Filep Karma**– join us in a protest on Wednesday 31st October 1-2.30pm in Richmond Terrace, London during visit from President of Indonesia visits London.
- Next group meeting - Thursday 8th November 2012 at 8pm at RISC
- Classical music concert booked for Friday 30th November at Chantry House, Henley – tickets on sale from Peter at amnesty.reading@googlemail.com
- Street Collection, Caversham, Saturday 5th January 2013 – contact Peter if you can take a turn on the rota.

GROUP NEWS IN BRIEF

- **PRIDE** - Great fun was had by all at this year's Reading Pride. We got over 200 cards signed for Noxolo, a South African LGBT activist. She was murdered and her death has never been investigated.



- **AI:UK'S CUBA CO-ORDINATOR, SUE BINGHAM, MEETS EXILED CUBAN ACTIVIST IN MIAMI** – Scroll to the end of this newsletter to read all about Sue's amazing visit and how much gratitude she received for Amnesty's work for Cuba.
- **SPONSOR OUR GROUP SECRETARY ANN IN HER KILIMANJARO CLIMB** - Our group secretary, Ann McFarlane, left today to start her climb of Kilimanjaro for her honeymoon and to raise money for Amnesty!! Do click through to her Just Giving page to make a donation – let's help get her to the top!!!
<http://www.justgiving.com/Anne-McFarlane>
- **Donations for our group's work** – Every Autumn, we ask for subscriptions of £10 to the group to support the room hire and travel expenses for our group meetings. Any excess is donated to Amnesty UK – we've been able to send nearly £1300 so far this year! Please send Peter (see email above) a message for details of how to pay.
- **TWITTER ACCOUNT** – Do you follow people or groups on Twitter?? Look for our group's new twitter feed on **@amnestyreading** We're called **AI:UK Reading Group**
- **NEW WEBSITE** – Take a look at our new website, as all the groups move onto this new format <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/groups/reading>

ACTIONS

Please click the link or scroll to the end of this document or follow the links for actions you can take to support issues that the Reading Group follows closely.

- Russia - New Pussy Riot action
- Cuba – action for the Ladies in White

Don't forget to keep up to date with our group's news, frequently updated with photos and updates:

- Website = <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/groups/reading>
- facebook page = <http://www.facebook.com/groups/36991953109/>
- twitter = @amnestyreading

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL READING GROUP MEETINGS

All at RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

MEETINGS: second Thursday of each month at 8pm. All are welcome.

CAMPAIGNS: We campaign on a wide range of human rights issues. We work Filep Karma, a prisoner of conscience in West Papua, on countries in Africa, South-East Asia, and particularly on human rights issues in Cuba, Russia, Burma, and Zimbabwe; for an end to the Death Penalty; to stop violence against women; on poverty; and on other issues and cases as they arise.

ALSO: We raise funds for Amnesty International, and can provide speakers about Amnesty and human rights issues for local organisations: contact our secretary Anne McFarlane, ammcf@o2.co.uk.

Amnesty Reading Newsletter editor Helen Ball, Tel: 07900 886 306
email: helenball03@yahoo.co.uk

Prosecutor General
Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Ul. Bolshaia Dimitrovka, d. 15a
Moscow, GSP-3, 107048
Russian Federation

Dear Prosecutor General

Re: Ekaterina Samutsevich Released; Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova Jailed

I have previously written to you concerning the above three young women arrested in March, charged with 'hooliganism on grounds of religious hatred or enmity' for a performance of a protest song by a feminist punk group *Pussy Riot* in Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral on 21 February, and subsequently found guilty and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in a penal colony.

I welcome the release of Ekaterina Samutsevich by the Moscow City Court on 10 October, though am surprised her release is only conditional.

I continue to believe that all three members of Pussy Riot should never have been prosecuted, and fail to understand how imprisoning them helps 'to restore social justice' as the Khamovnichesky District Court judge opined.

I am dismayed that Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova remain in jail. I therefore again urge you to release Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully expressing their views.

Furthermore, I call on the authorities to ensure that while Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova remain in custody they are neither intimidated nor ill-treated by prison staff or inmates, nor transferred to a distant penal colony but remain in the Moscow remand centre where they will continue to have proper legal representation and regular contact with their families.

Finally, I call on the authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression in the Russian Federation.

I trust you will consider these reasonable requests favourably, and look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely

cc His Excellency Mr Alexander V Yakovenko, Embassy of the Russian Federation,
London

TO:

Raúl Castro Ruz

Head of State and Government
Presidente de la República de Cuba
La Habana
Cuba

Fax: +53 7 83 33 085 (via Foreign Ministry);
+1 212 779 1697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)
Email: cuba@un.int (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)

FROM:

Date: 2012

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to hear of the release pending trial on 5 October of **Niurka Luque Álvarez**, who was arrested on 17 March 2012, along with 17 other Ladies in White, while demonstrating peacefully to commemorate the anniversary of the 2003 crackdown on dissidents.

However, I am very concerned that **Sonia Garro Alfonso** continues to be held in Guatao women's prison on the outskirts of Havana and her husband, **Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González**, is still being held in Havana's Combinado del Este prison.

I believe that the charges against Niurka Luque Álvarez – and the continued incarceration of Sonia Garro Alfonso and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González – appear to be politically motivated, and part of the Cuban authorities' ongoing campaign to intimidate and silence government critics.

I am therefore calling on you, the authorities, to charge Sonia Garro Alfonso and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González with internationally recognizable criminal offences or release them immediately, and to ensure that anyone charged is given a fair trial in compliance with international standards.

I am also asking you to cease immediately the harassment and intimidation of Ladies in White and other citizens who peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Yours truly,

Copies to:

Dr. Darío Delgado Cura

Attorney General
Fiscalía General de la República,
Amistad 552, e/Monte y Estrella, Centro Habana
La Habana,
Cuba

Her Excellency Esther Armenteros Cárdenas

Cuban Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Cuba
167 High Holborn,
London WC1 6PA
Fax: 020 7836 2602 embacuba@cubaldn.com

TO:

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra

Interior Minister

Ministro del Interior y Prisiones

Ministerio del Interior,

Plaza de la Revolución,

La Habana,

Cuba

Fax: +1 212 779 1697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

Email: correominint@mn.mn.co.cu

FROM:

Date:

2012

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to hear of the release pending trial on 5 October of **Niurka Luque Álvarez**, who was arrested on 17 March 2012, along with 17 other Ladies in White, while demonstrating peacefully to commemorate the anniversary of the 2003 crackdown on dissidents.

However, I am very concerned that **Sonia Garro Alfonso** continues to be held in Guatao women's prison on the outskirts of Havana and her husband, **Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González**, is still being held in Havana's Combinado del Este prison.

I believe that the charges against Niurka Luque Álvarez – and the continued incarceration of Sonia Garro Alfonso and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González – appear to be politically motivated, and part of the Cuban authorities' ongoing campaign to intimidate and silence government critics.

I am therefore calling on you, the authorities, to charge Sonia Garro Alfonso and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González with internationally recognizable criminal offences or release them immediately, and to ensure that anyone charged is given a fair trial in compliance with international standards.

I am also asking you to cease immediately the harassment and intimidation of Ladies in White and other citizens who peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Yours truly,

Copies to:

Dr. Darío Delgado Cura

Attorney General

Fiscalía General de la República,

Amistad 552, e/Monte y Estrella, Centro Habana

La Habana,

Cuba

Her Excellency Esther Armenteros Cárdenas

Cuban Ambassador

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba

167 High Holborn,

London WC1 6PA

Fax: 020 7836 2602 embacuba@cubaldn.com

Sue Bingham's Visit to Miami

Just over a year after inviting **Pablo Pacheco Avila**, the Cuban journalist and ex prisoner of conscience (POC), to stay with my husband and I at our home near Reading, we made the trip to Miami to see him again. After a few lazy days soaking up the fantastic art deco in South Beach, my husband decamped to play golf, and I stayed with Pablo, his wife, Oleivis and their son, Jimmy - now 14 years old and, predictably, glued to his mobile phone.

Despite only having spent a few days together last year, Pablo and I have become close friends and our reunion was quite emotional. Throughout the week he would introduce me at every opportunity, even to supermarket checkout staff, as "Sue from Amnesty in London, who did so much for my freedom". He never ceases to express his profound gratitude for Amnesty's help and support during the seven years he spent in prison in Cuba for peacefully expressing his desire for democracy.

As well as writing whenever he can, including his blog, <http://vocesdeldestierro.wordpress.com/>, Pablo works as Assistant Manager in a Cuban restaurant, from 11am to 11pm, six days a week - determined to pay his own way and do all he can to build a better life for his family in the US, after leaving Spain, his first place of exile, because of difficulties finding work there. He has, of course, received support from the large Cuban exile community in Miami, who despite coming from all walks of life and differing ideological standpoints, show him enormous respect as an ex POC.

Pablo is like a little tornado of positive energy. Never still, always talking on his mobile (even when weaving along 6 lane highways at 70 mph...which he assured me is not illegal in the States), sometimes to friends in Cuba who were also caught up in the Black Spring crackdown of dissidents in 2003. It was quite incongruous and disconcerting when, rushing around Macy's buying trainers, he passed me his phone and shouted "Felix Navarro!", and a few minutes later, "Pedro Argüelles!". Both men thanked me profusely for the invaluable work Amnesty has done for them, and is still doing, for human rights in their country.

I met many kind, fascinating, gracious people in Miami, but two who made a particularly lasting impression. Firstly, **José Luis García Paneque**, a close friend of Pablo who, along with his family, made huge efforts to make sure I was looked after and would enjoy my stay. José Luis is a plastic surgeon by profession and is now working as a medical assistant until he passes the necessary exams to validate his qualifications. He served seven years of his 24 year sentence before being given the option of exile to Spain. His mother told me heartbreakingly how she watched helplessly as her son became seriously ill in prison through lack of appropriate diet and medical care, fearing at every visit that he would not survive until the next one. The close family members who were allowed to travel with him were given just a few hours' notice of the departure to Spain, and still feel guilty about leaving the house untidy with unwashed pots in the sink. I'll never forget seeing him on the Spanish news when he arrived from Cuba - exhausted and excruciatingly gaunt with sunken, haunted eyes. I'm pleased to say that he now receives the treatment he needs and looks fit and well. José Luis was very keen to pass on his thanks and gratitude to UK activists who wrote to him for so many years. He was quite overcome to hear that I have a copy of a letter he wrote from Bayamo prison in 2009 in reply to a local UK Amnesty group. Once again, the power of letters is confirmed.

Secondly, I had the immense pleasure of meeting 94 year old **Huber Matos Benítez**, the first Cuban prisoner of conscience. Huber, a teacher, had opposed the Batista coup in 1952, which he felt was unconstitutional. He was one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution along

with Fidel Castro and the other members of the 26th of July Movement who fought to bring down the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in January 1959. Nine months after the triumph of the Revolution, he became more critical about the Marxist direction of the new government and its growing ties to the Cuban Communist Party. He was declared guilty of "treason and sedition" by the Castro regime, and served 20 years in prison before being released into exile in 1979.

Pablo took me to meet Huber at his home, on the morning of a conference at the University of Miami, where the two former prisoners of conscience from very different generations had been invited to take part in a discussion called "Anatomy of a Revolution". At the conference both Huber & Pablo spoke in a calm, measured way and with great dignity about their experiences as opponents of the Cuban regime, and their hopes for the country. Huber made a point of thanking Amnesty for their inestimable support (he wanted to point out that he had been delighted to visit London soon after his release and thank Amnesty in person) and he signed his book, *How Night Fell*, "For Sue...with great admiration" - a very humbling moment for me. Yet again I accepted overwhelming gratitude not for myself but on behalf of all the Amnesty activists who have worked tirelessly over so many years.

Thanks to Pablo, his family and friends, the trip was an unforgettable experience which has given me even more determination to do all I can for human rights in Cuba. Just over a year after inviting **Pablo Pacheco Avila**, the Cuban journalist and ex prisoner of conscience (POC), to stay with my husband and I at our home near Reading, we made the trip to Miami to see him again. After a few lazy days soaking up the fantastic art deco in South Beach, my husband decamped to play golf, and I stayed with Pablo, his wife, Oleivis and their son, Jimmy - now 14 years old and, predictably, glued to his mobile phone.

Despite only having spent a few days together last year, Pablo and I have become close friends and our reunion was quite emotional. Throughout the week he would introduce me at every opportunity, even to supermarket checkout staff, as "Sue from Amnesty in London, who did so much for my freedom". He never ceases to express his profound gratitude for Amnesty's help and support during the seven years he spent in prison in Cuba for peacefully expressing his desire for democracy.

As well as writing whenever he can, including his blog, <http://vocesdeldestierro.wordpress.com/>, Pablo works as Assistant Manager in a Cuban restaurant, from 11am to 11pm, six days a week - determined to pay his own way and do all he can to build a better life for his family in the US, after leaving Spain, his first place of exile, because of difficulties finding work there. He has, of course, received support from the large Cuban exile community in Miami, who despite coming from all walks of life and differing ideological standpoints, show him enormous respect as an ex POC.

Pablo is like a little tornado of positive energy. Never still, always talking on his mobile (even when weaving along 6 lane highways at 70 mph...which he assured me is not illegal in the States), sometimes to friends in Cuba who were also caught up in the Black Spring crackdown of dissidents in 2003. It was quite incongruous and disconcerting when, rushing around Macy's buying trainers, he passed me his phone and shouted "Felix Navarro!", and a few minutes later, "Pedro Argüelles!". Both men thanked me profusely for the invaluable work Amnesty has done for them, and is still doing, for human rights in their country.

I met many kind, fascinating, gracious people in Miami, but two who made a particularly lasting impression. Firstly, **José Luis García Paneque**, a close friend of Pablo who, along with his family, made huge efforts to make sure I was looked after and would enjoy my stay.

José Luis is a plastic surgeon by profession and is now working as a medical assistant until he passes the necessary exams to validate his qualifications. He served seven years of his 24 year sentence before being given the option of exile to Spain. His mother told me heartbreakingly how she watched helplessly as her son became seriously ill in prison through lack of appropriate diet and medical care, fearing at every visit that he would not survive until the next one. The close family members who were allowed to travel with him were given just a few hours' notice of the departure to Spain, and still feel guilty about leaving the house untidy with unwashed pots in the sink. I'll never forget seeing him on the Spanish news when he arrived from Cuba – exhausted and excruciatingly gaunt with sunken, haunted eyes. I'm pleased to say that he now receives the treatment he needs and looks fit and well. José Luis was very keen to pass on his thanks and gratitude to UK activists who wrote to him for so many years. He was quite overcome to hear that I have a copy of a letter he wrote from Bayamo prison in 2009 in reply to a local UK Amnesty group. Once again, the power of letters is confirmed.

Secondly, I had the immense pleasure of meeting 94 year old **Huber Matos Benítez**, the first Cuban prisoner of conscience. Huber, a teacher, had opposed the Batista coup in 1952, which he felt was unconstitutional. He was one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution along with Fidel Castro and the other members of the 26th of July Movement who fought to bring down the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in January 1959. Nine months after the triumph of the Revolution, he became more critical about the Marxist direction of the new government and its growing ties to the Cuban Communist Party. He was declared guilty of "treason and sedition" by the Castro regime, and served 20 years in prison before being released into exile in 1979.

Pablo took me to meet Huber at his home, on the morning of a conference at the University of Miami, where the two former prisoners of conscience from very different generations had been invited to take part in a discussion called "Anatomy of a Revolution". At the conference both Huber & Pablo spoke in a calm, measured way and with great dignity about their experiences as opponents of the Cuban regime, and their hopes for the country. Huber made a point of thanking Amnesty for their inestimable support (he wanted to point out that he had been delighted to visit London soon after his release and thank Amnesty in person) and he signed his book, *How Night Fell*, "For Sue...with great admiration" - a very humbling moment for me. Yet again I accepted overwhelming gratitude not for myself but on behalf of all the Amnesty activists who have worked tirelessly over so many years.

Thanks to Pablo, his family and friends, the trip was an unforgettable experience which has given me even more determination to do all I can for human rights in Cuba.



Sue and Pablo at Memorial to Orlando Zapata Tamayo / Sue with Huber Matos & Jose Luis Paneque